

FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Office of Consumer and Business Education








Avoiding the Muscle Hustle: Tips for Buying Exercise Equipment

Looking for a way to keep fit, stay limber or lose weight? A diet of regular exercise can help.

Which exercise is best? The one you're really going to do. For some people, that means working out at home on exercise equipment.

If you're considering buying exercise equipment, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) offers this advice: Evaluate advertising claims for fitness products carefully. The FTC has sued marketers of electronic abdominal exercise belts for claiming that users could get "six-pack abs" and lose inches in a short time. The Food and Drug Administration has never cleared any kind of electronic abdominal muscle stimulator for weight loss or obtaining "rock-hard" abs. While some electronic muscle stimulators may temporarily strengthen, tone or firm muscles, they will not lead to major muscle-toning or a major change in appearance.

The FTC advises consumers to:

-  Ignore claims that an exercise machine or device can provide long-lasting, easy, "no-sweat" results in a short time. These claims are false: You can't get the benefits of exercise unless you exercise.
-  Don't fall for claims that a product can burn fat off a particular part of the body — for example, the buttocks, hips or stomach. Achieving a major change in your appearance requires sensible eating and regular exercise that works the whole body.
-  Read the ad's fine print. The advertised results may be based on more than just using a machine; they also may be based on restricting calories.
-  Be skeptical of testimonials and before-and-after pictures from "satisfied" customers. Their experiences may not be typical. Just because one person had success with the equipment doesn't mean you will, too.
-  Do the calculations when you read statements like "three easy payments of ..." or "only \$49.95 a month." The advertised cost may not include shipping and handling fees, sales tax, and delivery and set-up fees. Find out the details before you order.
-  Get details on warranties, guarantees and return policies. A "30-day money-back guarantee" may not sound as good if you have to pay shipping on a bulky piece of equipment you want to "return to sender."
-  Check out the company's customer and support services. Call the advertised toll-free numbers to get an idea of how easy it is to reach a company representative and how helpful he or she is.

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, visit www.ftc.gov or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357). The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.